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UNH Pier Project Moves Forward In New Castle; Remaining Grant Funds Will Enhance Current Marine Efforts

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DURHAM, N.H. – Construction has begun on the replacement pier and pier facility operated by the University of New Hampshire in New Castle. The work is funded by a grant originally received from NOAA in 2001.

“The replacement pier will provide essential berth space for the small fleet of UNH vessels, and access to the seawater environment, both of which are critical for the university’s world-class, \$35 million-per-year marine research activity,” said Jonathan Pennock, director of the UNH Marine Program.

Pennock will continue to maintain close ties with boards in the town to assure a smooth project, and continued responsiveness to residents’ concerns.

UNH’s original vision included a major research laboratory facility adjacent to the pier in New Castle, but deed restrictions were determined to require that there be no impact of the project on the historic resources at the Fort Point location.

In response, UNH officials conducted a thorough analysis of potential sites along the Seacoast in order to bring several alternatives forward to the public. Partnering with the Seacoast Science Center at Odiorne Point State Park was explored, with the goal of building a lab that would serve both research and educational needs, and increase the public outreach impact of the combined facility.

“Both the university and the Science Center are dedicated to enhancing our understanding of the marine environment through discovery and public outreach,” said Pennock. “It appeared to be a good fit for both.”

However, as bids were received for the pier complex, it became clear that the cost of this part of the project will be much higher than planned in 2001. Requirements to investigate historic resources on the Fort Point property and then to develop, and receive approval for, plans to preserve and maintain those resources, have added years to the planning process.

The expense of meeting regulatory requirements, coupled with an annual 10-percent rate of inflation in construction costs, have increased the price tag for the pier and support building substantially. The pier alone will cost almost \$6 million to renovate, according to Pennock.

“As a result of these financial realities and looming deadlines for the end of the funding period

allowed on the NOAA grant, we do not feel we have the time and resources necessary to continue to explore, with stakeholders, the location of the envisioned marine laboratory on the Seacoast," he added.

Instead, the university will explore using the remaining funds from the NOAA grant to meet other longstanding and high priority marine laboratory needs on campus and at other existing UNH facilities.

"While not the signature coastal marine laboratory originally proposed, an updated and integrated UNH marine laboratory complex, including the critical pier resource, will dramatically improve marine research and education at the University of New Hampshire, and bring the benefits of that research to the state and nation," Pennock said.

Numerous Seacoast residents and elected officials participated in the planning process and public forums over the past five years. "We've appreciated the input from everyone," Pennock said, "and we look forward to providing continued support for marine research and education through our new and upgraded facilities."